28 August 2000.

The Toronto Star is running a series on Canadian investigation of spying by the US and Israel on Canadian intelligence agencies through the use of a powerful search and surveillance software named "Promis," which allegedly had a backdoor installed by Israeli intelligence. This Promis allegation is attributed by *The Star* to the 1999 book, *Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of the Mossad*, by Gordon Thomas, Thomas Dunne Books, New York. ISBN 0-312-25284-6. Below are Promis excerpts from *Gideon's Spies*.

The Toronto Star series (thanks to J. Orlin Grabbe):

> August 25, 2000:
> **Spy computer `trap' probed. Rigged software claimed to hack intelligence files**
>
> http://www.thestar.com/thestar/back_issues/ED20000825/news/20000825NEW01_NA-SPY.html
>
> August 28, 2000:
> **'Spy trap' probe now tied to U.S. and Britain. Murdered pair may have links to software plot** (URLs may change from current to back issues)
>
> http://thestar.com/editorial/updates/top/20000828NEW01b_NA-MOUNTIE28.html
>
> **Mounties debugged spy software in '94: Ex-agent. But U.S., Israel drained secrets for a decade before discovery**
>
> http://www.thestar.com/thestar/editorial/news/20000828NEW06_NA-SPY.html

For more on Michael Riconoscuito, the person whom *The Star* describes as "the American computer whiz who has publicly claimed he helped prepare Inslaw's Promis software for sale to Canada in 1983 and 1984,":

> http://orlingrabbe.com/ricono.htm

See also the William Hamilton/INSLAW Case Archive at the Electronic Frontier Foundation:

> http://www.eff.org/pub/Legal/Cases/INSLAW/

Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of the Mossad

Chapter 10

[excerpts, pages 203-219]

In 1967, communications expert William Hamilton returned to the United States from Vietnam, where he had devised a network of electronic listening posts to monitor the Vietcong as its forces moved through the jungle. Hamilton was offered a job with the National Security Agency. His first task had been to create a computerized Vietnamese-English dictionary that proved to be a powerful aid to translating Vietcong messages and interrogating prisoners.

It was an era when the revolution in electronic communications- satellite technology and microcircuitry- was changing the face of intelligence gathering: faster and more secure encryption and better imagery were coming online at increasing speed. Computers grew smaller and faster; more sophisticated sensors were able to separate thousands of conversations; photographic spectrum analysis lifted from millions of dots only the ones that were of interest; microchips made it possible to hear a whisper a hundred yards away; infrared lenses let one see in the black of night.

The fiber-optic sinews of a new society had contributed to operational intelligence: to amass and correlate data on a scale far beyond human capability offered a powerful tool in searching for a pattern and a modus operandi in terrorist actions. Work had started on the computer-driven Facial-Analysis Comparison and Elimi- nation System (FACES) that would revolutionize the system of identifying a person from photographs. Based on forty-nine characteristics, each categorized on a 1 to 4 scale, FACES could make 15 million binary yes/no decisions in a *second*. Interlinked computers did simultaneous searches to eventually make a staggering 40 million binary decisions a second. Computers themselves had begun to reduce in size but retained a memory that contained the equivalent information of a five-hundred-page reference book.

Still working for the NSA, Hamilton saw an opening in this ever-expanding market; he would create a software program to interface with data banks in other computer systems. Its application in in- telligence work would mean that the owner of the program would be able to interdict most other systems without, their users' being aware. A patriotic man, Hamilton intended his first client for the system would be the United States government.

Just as NASA had given the country an unassailable lead in space technology, so William Hamilton was confident he would do the same for the U.S. intelligence community. Encouraged by the NSA, the inventor worked sixteen-hour days, seven days a week. Obsessive and secretive, he was the quintessential researcher; the NSA was full of them.

After three years, Hamilton was close to producing the ultimate surveillance tool -- a program that could track the movements of literally untold numbers of people in any part of the world. President Reagan's warning to terrorists, "You can run, but you can't hide, was about to come true.

Hamilton resigned from the NSA and purchased a small company called Inslaw. The company's stated function was to cross- check court actions and discover if there was common background to litigants, witnesses and their families, even their attorneys -- anyone involved or becoming involved in an action. Hamilton called the system Promis. By 1981, he had developed it to the point where he could copyright the software and turn Inslaw into a small, profit-making company. The future looked promising.

The NSA protested that he had made use of the agency's own research facilities to produce the program. Hamilton hotly rejected the allegation but offered to lease Promis to the Justice Department on a straightforward basis: each time the program was used, Inslaw would receive a fee. The proposed deal itself was unremarkable; Justice, like any governinent department, had hundreds of contractors providing services. Unknown to Hamilton, Justice had sent a copy of Hamilton's program to the NSA for "evaluation."

The reasons this was done would remain unclear. Hamilton had already demonstrated to Justice that the Promis program could do what he claimed: electronically probe into the lives of people in a way never before possible. For justice and its investigative arm, the FBI, Promis offered a powerful tool to fight the Mafia's money-laundering and other criminal activities. Overnight it could also revolutionize the DEA's fight against the Colombian drug barons. To the CIA, Promis could become a weapon every bit as effective as a spy satellite. The possibilities seemed endless.

In the meantime, one of those characters the world of international wheeling and dealing regularly produces had heard about Promis. Earl Brian had been California's secretary of health during Reagan's time as state governor. Largely because Brian spoke Farsi, Reagan had encouraged him to put together a Medicare plan for the Iranian government. It was one of those quixotic ideas the future president of the United States loved: a version of Medicare would show Iran a positive side of America and at the same time improve the United States' image in the region. In a memorable phrase to Brian, the governor said, "If Medicare works in California, it can work anywhere."

During his visits to Tehran, Brian had come to the attention of Rafi Eitan, who was then one of the helmsmen steering the arms-for-hostages deal ever closer to the rocks. He invited Brian to Israel. They immediately struck up a rapport. Brian was captivated by his host's account of capturing Eichmann; Rafi Eitan was equally fascinated by his guest's description of Californian life in the fast lane.

Rafi Eitan soon realized that Brian could not widen his own circle of contacts in Iran and privately thought Reagan's idea for a Medicare program in Iran was "just about the craziest thing I had heard for a long time." Over the years the two men had stayed in touch; Rafi Eitan had even found time to send Brian a postcard from Apollo, Pennsylvania, where he was checking out the Numec plant. It contained the message, "This is a good place to be -- from." Brian had kept Rafi Eitan informed about Promis.

In 1990 Brian arrived in Tel Aviv. He was more than weary from his long flight; the paleness on his face came from anger that the Justice Department was using a version of the Promis program to track money-laundering and other criminal activities.

Rafi Eitan's instincts told him that his old friend could not have arrived at a more opportune time. Once more conflict had flared between Mossad and the other members of the Israeli intelligence community. The cause was a new Arab uprising, the Intifada. Promis could be an effective weapon to counter its activities.

The revolution had spread with remarkable speed, stunning the Israelis and galvanizing the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The more people the Israeli army arrested, shot, beat, and uprooted from their homes, the swifter the Intifada spread. There was something close to grudging understanding outside Israel when a young Arab boy used a hang glider to evade Israel's sophisticated border defenses with Lebanon and land in scrubland close to the small northern town of Kiryat Shmona. In a few minutes the youth killed six heavily armed Israeli soldiers and wounded seven more before he was shot dead.

The incident became enshrined in Palestinian minds; within the Israeli intelligence community there was furious finger-pointing. Shin Bet blamed Aman; both blamed Mossad for its failure to provide advance warning from Lebanon. Worse followed. Six dangerous terrorists escaped from the maximum-security jail in Gaza. Mossad blamed Shin Bet. That agency said the escape plot had been organized from outside the country -- which made Mossad culpable.

Almost daily, Israeli soldiers and civilians were shot dead in the streets of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa. Desperate to regain authority, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin announced he was implementing a policy of "force, might and beatings," but it had little effect.

Beset by deepening interservice strife, the Israeli intelligence community was unable to agree on a coordinated policy to deal with mass Arab resistance on a scale not seen since the War of Independence. An added thorn was the criticism from the United States over the growing evidence on TV screens of the brutal methods deployed by Israeli soldiers. For the first time U.S. networks, normally friendly to Israel, began to screen footage which, for sheer brutality, matched what had happened in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Two Israeli soldiers were filmed relentlessly smashing a rock against the arm of a Palestinian youth; an IDF patrol was caught on camera beating a pregnant Palestinian mother; children in Hebron were shown having IDF rifle butts smashed against their bodies for throwing stones.

The Intifada coalesced to form the United National Leadership of the Uprising. Every Arab community was postered with instructions in Arabic on how to stage strikes, close shops, boycott Israeli goods, refuse to recognize the civil administration. It was reminiscent of the resistance in the last days of the German occupation of France in World War II.

Desperate to reestablish Mossad's preeminent role among the intelligence community, Nahum Admoni took action. On February 14, 1988, a kidon team was sent to the Cypriot port of Limassol. They planted a powerful bomb on the chassis of a Volkswagen Golf. It belonged to one of the leaders of the Intifada, Muhammad Tamimi. With him were two senior PLO officers. They had met with Libyan officials who had handed over $1 million to continue bankrolling the Intifada. All three men were killed in the massive explosion that rocked the entire port.

The following day, Mossad struck again-planting a limpet mine on the hull of the *Soi Phayne*, a passenger ship the PLO had just bought for an intended public relations exercise. With the world's press on board, the ship would have sailed to Haifa as a poignant reminder of the Palestinians' "right to return" to their homeland -- and a more pointed reminder of the Jewish boats, immortalized by the *Exodus*, which, forty

years before, had defied the British navy to bring the survivors of the Holocaust to Israel, also under their "right to return." The *Soi Phayne* was destroyed.

The operations had done nothing to daunt Arab determination. At every turn guerrillas were able to outsmart the Israelis, whose only response seemed to be violence and more violence. The world watched as Israel not only failed to stop the Intifada but also lost the propaganda war. Commentators made the comparison that here was a modern-day David-versus-Goliath conflict, with the IDF cast in the role of the Philistine giant.

Yasser Arafat used the Intifada as an opportunity to regain control over his dispossessed people. Around the world his voice cracked with fury on radio and television that what was happening was the direct result of Israel's policy of stealing Arab land. He urged every Arab to rally in support. One day Arafat was in Kuwait urging Hamas, the terrorist group backed by Iran, to provide its deadly skills. The next he was in Lebanon, meeting with the leaders of Islamic Jihad. Arafat was achieving what had, only a short time before, seemed impossible-uniting Arabs of all persuasions in a common cause. To them all he was "Mr. Palestine" or "Chairman."

Mossad was constantly flummoxed by Arafat's strategies as he flitted between Arab capitals. It had little or no warning where he would turn up, or whom he would next rally to his side.

All this and more Rafi Eitan explained to his houseguest, Earl Brian. In turn Brian described how Promis worked. In his view, there was still work to be done to bring the program up to speed. Rafi Eitan realized that Promis could then have an impact on the Intifada. For a start, the system could lock on to computers in the PLO's seventeen offices scattered around the world to see where Arafat was going and what he could be planning. Rafi Eitan put aside his foraging for scrap metal and focused on how to exploit the brave new world Promis offered.

No longer, for instance, would it be necessary to rely solely on human intelligence to understand the mind-set of a terrorist. With Promis it would be possible to know exactly when and where he would strike. Promis could track a terrorist's every step.

To achieve such a breakthrough would once more undoubtedly make him a powerful figure in the Israeli intelligence community. But the wounds inflicted on him by his former peers had gone deep. He had been turned out into the cold with little more than a modest pension. He was getting on in years; his first obligation was to his family, whom, through his work, he had been forced to neglect for long periods. Promis offered an opportunity to make amends; handled properly, it could make his fortune. However, for all his brilliance, Rafi Eitan was no computer genius; his skills in that area extended to little more than switching on his modem. But his years at LAKAM had given him access to all the experts he would need.

When Earl Brian returned to the United States, Rafi Eitan put together a small team of former LAKAM programmers. They deconstructed the Promis disc and rearranged its various components, then added several elements of their own. There was no way for anyone to be able to claim ownership of what Promis had become. Rafi Eitan decided to keep the original name because it was "a good marketing tool to explain what the system was."

Intelligence operatives, untrained in computer technology beyond knowing which keys to tap, would be able to access information and judgments far more comprehensive than they could ever carry in their own heads. A Promis disc could fit a laptop computer and choose from a myriad of alternatives the one that made most sense. It would eliminate the need for deductive reasoning because there were too many correct but irrelevant matters to simultaneously take into account for human reasoning alone to suffice. Promis could be programmed to eliminate all superfluous lines of inquiry and amass and correlate data at a speed and scale beyond human capability.

But before it could be sold, according to Ben-Menashe, Rafi Eitan needed to add one further element. Ben-Menashe claims he was summoned a played a large part in inserting a "trapdoor," a built-in chip that, unknown to any purchaser, would allow Rafi Eitan to know what information was being sought.

Ben-Menashe knew someone who could create a trapdoor that even the most sophisticated scanners would be unable to detect. The man ran a small computer research and development company in Northern California. He and Ben-Menashe had been schoolboy friends, and for five thousand dollars he agreed to produce the microchip. It was, Ben-Menashe admitted, cheap at the price. The next stage would be to test the system.

Jordan was selected as the site, not only because it bordered on Israel, but because it had become a haven for the leaders of the Intifada. From the desert kingdom, they directed the Arab street mobs on the West Bank and Gaza to launch further attacks inside Israel. After an atrocity, PLO terrorists would slip across the border into Jordan, doing so often with the connivance of the Jordanian army.

Consequently, long before the Intifada, Jordan had become a proving ground for Mossad to develop its electronic skills. In the 1970s, Mossad technicians had tapped into the computer IBM had sold to the country's military intelligence service. The information gained had supplemented that provided by the deep-cover katsa Rafi Eitan had placed inside King Hussein's palace. Promis would offer much more.

To sell it directly to Jordan was impossible because normal business links between both countries were still some years away. Instead, Earl Brian's company, Hadron, made the deal. When the company's computer experts installed the program in Amman's military headquarters, they discovered the Jordanians had a French-designed system to track the movements of PLO leaders. Promis was secretly wired into the French system. In Tel Aviv, Rafi Eitan soon saw results as the trapdoor showed which PLO leaders the Jordanians were tracking.

The next stage was to prepare the sales pitch for Promis. Yasser Arafat was selected as the ideal example. The PLO chairman was renowned for being security-conscious; he constantly changed his plans, never slept in the same bed two nights in succession, altered his mealtimes at the last moment.

Whenever Arafat moved, the details were entered on a secure PLO computer. But Promis could hack into its defenses to discover what aliases and false passports he was using. Promis could obtain his phone bills and check the numbers called. It would then cross-check those with other calls made from those numbers. In that way, Promis would have a "picture" of Arafat's communications.

On a trip he would inform the local security authorities of his presence, and steps would be taken to provide protection. Promis could obtain the details by interdicting police computers. Wherever he went, Yasser Arafat would be unable to hide from Promis.

Rafi Eitan realized that neither Earl Brian nor his company had the resources to market Promis globally. That would require someone with superb international contacts, boundless energy, and proven negotiating skills. There was only one man Rafi Eitan knew who had those requirements: Robert Maxwell.

Maxwell needed little convincing and, in his usual ebullient manner when there was a deal to be profited from, said he had a computer company through which to sell Promis. Degem Computers Limited was based in Tel Aviv and was already playing a useful role in Mossad's activities. Maxwell had allowed Mossad operatives, posing as Degem employees, to use the company's suboffices in Central and South America. Now Maxwell saw an opportunity not only to make a healthy profit from marketing Promis through Degem, but to further establish his own importance to Mossad and ultimately Israel.

On recent visits to Israel he had begun to display disturbing traits. Maxwell told Admoni he should start employing psychics to read the minds of Mossad's enemies. He began to suggest targets for elimination. He wanted to meet kidons and inspect their training camps. All these requests were firmly but politely parried by the Mossad chief. But within Mossad, questions began to be asked about Maxwell. Was his behavior only that of a megalomaniac throwing about his weight? Or was it a precursor of something else? Could the time eventually come when, despite all he had done for Israel, Robert Maxwell became sufficiently mentally unstable and unpredictable to create a problem?

But there was no doubting Maxwell was a brilliant marketeer of Promis -- or, as far as Mossad was concerned, of the effectiveness of the system. The service had been the first to obtain the program and it

had been a valuable tool in its campaign against the Intifada. Many of its leaders had left Jordan for safer hideouts in Europe after several had been assassinated in Jordan by kidons.

A spectacular success came when an Intifada commander who had moved to Rome called a Beirut number that Mossad's computers already had listed as the home of a known bomb maker. The Rome caller wanted to meet the bomb maker in Athens. Mossad used Promis to check all the travel offices in Rome and Beirut for the travel arrangements of both men. In Beirut, further checks revealed the bomber had ordered the local utility companies to suspend supplies to his home. A further search by Promis of the local PLO computers also showed the bomber had switched flights at the last moment. It did not save him. He was killed by a car bomb on the way to Beirut airport. Shortly afterward, in Rome, the Intifada commander was killed in a hit-and-run accident.

Meantime, Mossad was using Promis to read the secret intelligence of a number of services. In Guatemala, it uncovered the close ties between the country's security forces and drug traffickers and their outlets in the United States. Names were passed on to the DEA and FBI by Mossad.

In South Africa, a katsa in the Israeli embassy used Promis to track the country's banned revolutionary organization and their contacts with Middle Eastern groups. In Washington, Mossad specialists at the Israeli embassy used Promis to penetrate the communications of other diplomatic missions and U.S. government departments. The same was happening in London and other European capitals. The system had continued to yield valuable information for Mossad. By 1989, over $500 million worth of Promis programs had been sold to Britain, Australia, South Korea, and Canada. The figure would have been even bigger but for the CIA marketing its own version to intelligence agencies. In Britain, Promis was used by MI5 in Northern Ireland to track terrorists and the movements of political leaders like Gerry Adams.

Maxwell had also managed to sell the system to the Polish intelligence service, the UB. In return the Poles, according to Ben-Menashe, allowed Mossad to steal a Russian MiG-29. The operation was a reminder of the theft of the earlier version of the MiG from Iraq. A Polish general in charge of the UB office in Gdansk, in return for $1 million paid into a Citibank account in New York, had arranged for the aircraft to be written off as no longer airworthy, though the plane had only recently arrived from its Russian aircraft factory. The fighter was dismantled, placed in t crates marked "Agricultural Machinery," and flown to Tel Aviv. There the plane was reassembled and test-flown by the Israeli air force, enabling its pilots to counter the MiG-29s in service with Syria.

It was weeks before the theft was discovered by Moscow during a routine inventory of aircraft supplied to Warsaw Pact countries. A strong protest was made by Moscow to Israel -- backed by the threat to stop the exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union. The Israeli government, its air force having discovered all the MiG's secrets, apologized profusely for the "mistaken zeal of officers acting unofficially" and promptly returned the aircraft. By then the UB general had joined his dollar fortune in the United States. Washington had agreed to give him a new identity in return for the USAF being allowed to conduct its own inspection of the MiG.

Shortly afterward Robert Maxwell flew to Moscow. Officially he was there to interview Mikhail Gorbachev. In reality he had come to sell Promis to the KGB. Through its secret trapdoor microchip, it gave Israel unique access to Soviet military intelligence, making Mossad one of the best-briefed services on Russian intentions.

From Moscow Maxwell flew to Tel Aviv. As usual he was received like a potentate, excused all airport formalities and welcomed by an official greeter from the Foreign Office.

Maxwell treated him the way he did all his staff, insisting the official carry his bags and sit beside the driver. Maxwell also demanded to know where his motorcycle escort was, and when told it was not available, he threatened to call the prime minister's office to have the greeter fired. At every traffic stop, Maxwell harangued the hapless official, and he continued to do so all the way to his hotel suite. Waiting was Maxwell's favorite prostitute. He sent her running; there were far more pressing matters than satisfying his sexual needs.

In London Robert Maxwell's newspaper empire was in grave financial trouble. Soon, without a substantial injection of capital, it would have to cease operations. But, in the City of London, where he had previously always found funding, there was a reluctance to go on providing it. Hard-nosed financiers who had met Maxwell sensed that behind his bluster and bully-boy tactics was a man who was losing the financial acumen that in the past had allowed them to forgive so much. In those days he had raged and threatened at the slightest challenge. Bankers had curbed their anger and caved in to his demands. But they would no longer do so. In the Bank of England and other financial institutions in the City, the word was that Maxwell was no longer a safe bet.

Their information was partially based on confidential reports from Israel that Maxwell was being pressed by his original Israeli investors to repay them the money that had helped him to acquire the Mirror Group. The time limit on repayments had long gone and the demands from the Israelis had become more insistent. Trying to fend them off, Maxwell had promised them a higher return on their money if they waited. The Israelis were not satisfied: they wanted their money back now. This was why Maxwell had come to Tel Aviv: he hoped to cajole them into granting him another extension. The signs were not good. During the flight, he had received several angry phone calls from the investors, threatening to place the matter before the City of London regulatory body.

There was a further matter for Maxwell to be concerned over. He had stolen some of the very substantial profits from ORA that he had been entrusted to hide in Soviet Bloc banks. He had used the money to try to prop up the Mirror Group. Maxwell had already stolen all he could from the staff pension fund, and the ORA money would not stretch very far.

And, unlike the Israeli investors, once that theft was uncovered, he would find himself confronting some very hard men, among them Rafi Eitan. Maxwell knew enough about the former Mossad operative to realize that would not be a pleasant experience.

From his hotel suite, Maxwell began to strategize. His share of the profits from Degem's marketing of Promis would not be able to stem the crisis. Neither would profits from *Maariv*, the Israeli tabloid modeled on his flagship *Daily Mirror*. But there was one possibility, the Tel Aviv-based Cytex Corporation he owned, which manufactured high-tech printing equipment. If Cytex could be sold quickly, the money could go some way to solving matters.

Maxwell ordered Cytex's senior executive, the son of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, to his suite. The executive had bad news: a all quick sale was unlikely. Cytex, while holding its own, faced increasing competition. This was not the time to take it to the market. To sell would also throw skilled people out of work at a time when It unemployment was a serious problem in Israel.

The reaction provoked a furious outburst from Maxwell as his last hope of rescue faded. Tactically he made an error in lambasting the prime minister's son, who now told his father that Maxwell was in serious financial trouble. The prime minister, aware of the tycoon's links to Mossad, informed Nahum Admoni. He called a meeting of senior staff to see how to deal with what had become a problem.

Later it emerged that several options were discussed. Mossad could ask the prime minister to use his own considerable influence with the Israeli investors not only to wait a while longer for their money, but to mobilize their own resources and contacts to find money to bail out Maxwell. This was rejected on the grounds that Maxwell had managed to upset Shamir with his cavalier attitude. Everyone knew that Shamir had a strong sense of self-preservation and would now wish to distance himself from Maxwell.

Another option was for Mossad to approach its highly placed sayanim in the City of London and urge them to support a rescue package for Mossad. At the same time Mossad-friendly journalists in Britain could be encouraged to write supportive stories about the troubled tycoon.

Again those suggestions were discounted. Reports Admoni had received from London suggested that many of the sayanim would welcome the end of Maxwell and that few journalists outside Mirror newspapers would dream of writing favorable stories about a tycoon who had spent years threatening the media.

The final option was for Mossad to break off all contact with Maxwell. There was a risk there: Maxwell, on the evidence of his present unpredictable state of mind, could well use his newspapers to actually attack Mossad. Given the access he had been given, that could have the most serious consequences.

On that somber note, the meeting concluded that Admoni would see Maxwell and remind him of his responsibility to both Mossad and Israel. That night the two men met over dinner in Maxwell's hotel suite. What transpired between them would remain a secret. But hours later, Robert Maxwell left Tel Aviv in his private plane. It would be the last time, it would turn out, that anyone in Israel would see him alive.

Back in London, Maxwell, against all the odds, seemed to be succeeding in holding on to his newspaper group. He was likened to an African whirling dervish as he went from one meeting to another seeking financial support. From time to time he called Mossad to speak to Admoni, always informing the director general's secretary that the "little Czech" was on the line. The sobriquet had been bestowed on Maxwell after he had been recruited. What was said in those calls would remain unknown.

But a clue would later emerge from the former katsa, Victor Ostrovsky. He believed Maxwell was insisting it was payback time; that the huge sum of money he had stolen from the Mirror pension fund should now be returned to him. At the same time, Maxwell also proposed that Mossad should, on his behalf, lobby for Mordechai Vanunu to be freed and handed over to him. Maxwell would e(then fly the technician to London and personally interview him for the *Daily Mirror*. The story would be Vanunu's "act of atonement," written in a way that would show Israel's compassion. With the chutzpah characteristic of so many of his actions, Maxwell added it would be a huge circulation booster for the *Mirror* and would unlock those doors still closed to him in the City of London.

Ostrovsky was not alone in believing that the preposterous plan finally decided Mossad that Robert Maxwell had become a dangerous loose cannon.

On September 30, 1991, further evidence of Maxwell's bizarre behavior came when he telephoned Admoni. This time there was no disguising the threat in Maxwell's words. His financial affairs had once more taken a turn for the worse, and he was being investigated in Parliament and the British media, so long held at bay by his posse of high-priced lawyers and their quiver of writs. Maxwell then said that unless Mossad arranged to immediately return all the stolen *Mirror* pension fund money, he could not be sure if he would be able to keep secret Adnioni's ineeting with Vladimir Kryuchkov, the former head of the KGB. Kryuchkov was now in a Moscow prison awaiting trial for his role in an abortive coup to oust Mikhail St Gorbachev. A key element of the plot had been a meeting Kryuchkov had on Maxwell's yacht in the Adriatic shortly before the coup was launched.

Mossad had promised that Israel would use its influence with the United States and key European countries to diplomatically recognize the new regime in Moscow. In return, Kryuchkov would arrange for all Soviet Jews to be released and sent to Israel. The discussion had come to nothing. But revealing it could seriously harm Israel's credibility with the existing Russian regime and with the United States.

That was the moment, Victor Ostrovsky would write, when "a small meeting of right wingers at Mossad headquarters resulted in a consensus to terminate Maxwell." If Ostrovsky's claim is true -- and it has never been formally denied by Israel -- then it was unthinkable that the group was acting without the highest sanction and perhaps even with the tacit knowledge of Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir, the man who had once had his own share of killing Mossad's enemies.

The matter for Mossad could only have become more urgent with the publication of a book by the veteran American investigative reporter Seymour M. Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel, America and the Bomb*, which dealt with Israel's emergence as a nuclear power. News of the book had caught Mossad totally by surprise and copies were rushed to Tel Aviv. Well researched, it could nevertheless still have been effectively dealt with by saying nothing; the painful lesson of the mistake of confronting Ostrovsky's publisher (also the publisher of this book) had been absorbed. But there was one problem: Hersh had identified Maxwell's links to Mossad. Those ties mostly involved the Mirror Group's handling of the Vanunu story and the relationship between Nick Davies, ORA, and Ari Ben-Menashe. Predictably, Maxwell had taken refuge behind a battery of lawyers, issuing writs against Hersh and his London

publishers. But, for the first time, he met his match. Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize winner, refused to be cowed. In Parliament, more pointed questions were asked about Maxwell's links to Mossad. Old suspicions surfaced. MPs demanded to know, under parliamentary privilege, how much Maxwell knew about Mossad's operations in Britain. For Victor Ostrovsky, "the ground was starting to burn under Maxwell's feet."

Ostrovsky would claim that the carefully prepared Mossad plan to kill Maxwell hinged on being able to persuade him to keep a rendezvous where Mossad could strike. It had a striking similarity to the plot that had led to the death of Mehdi Ben-Barka in Paris. On October 29, 1991, Maxwell received a call from a katsa at the Israeli embassy in Madrid. Maxwell was asked to come to Spain the next day, and, according to Ostrovsky, "his caller promised that things would be worked out so there was no need to panic." Maxwell was told to fly to Gibraltar and board his yacht, the *Lady Ghislaine*, and order the crew to set sail for the Canary Islands "and wait there for a message." Robert Maxwell agreed to do as instructed.

On October 30, four Israelis arrived in the Moroccan port of Rabat. They said they were tourists on a deep-sea fishing vacation and hired an oceangoing motor yacht. They set off toward the Canary Islands.

On October 31, after Maxwell reached the port of Santa Cruz on the island of Tenerife, he dined alone in the Hotel Mency. After dinner a man briefly joined him. Who he was and what they spoke about remain part of the mystery of the last days of Robert Maxwell. Shortly afterward, Maxwell returned to his yacht and ordered it back to sea. For the next thirty-six hours, the *Lady Ghislaine* sailed between the islands, keeping well clear of land, cruising at various speeds. Maxwell had told the captain he was deciding where to go next. The crew could not recall Maxwell showing such indecision.

In what it claimed was a "world exclusive," headlined "How and why Robert Maxwell was murdered," Britain's *Business Age* magazine subsequently claimed that a two-man hit team crossed in a dinghy during the night from a motor yacht that had shadowed the *Lady Ghislaine*. Boarding the yacht, they found Maxwell on the afterdeck. The men overpowered him before he could call for help. Then, one assassin injected a bubble of air into Maxwell's neck via his jugular vein. It took just a few moments for Maxwell to die."

The magazine concluded the body was dropped overboard and the assassins returned to their yacht. It would be sixteen hours before Maxwell was recovered -- enough time for a needle prick to recede beyond detection as a result of water immersion and the skin being nibbled by fish.

More certain, on the night of November 4-5, Mossad's problems with Maxwell were laid to rest in the cold swell of the Atlantic. The subsequent police investigation and the Spanish autopsy left unanswered questions. Why were only two of the yacht's eleven-man crew awake? Normally five shared the night watch. To whom did Maxwell send a number of fax messages during those hours? What became of the copies? Why did the crew take so long to establish Maxwell was not on board? Why did they delay raising the alarm for a further seventy minutes? To this day no convincing answers have emerged.

Three Spanish pathologists were assigned to perform the autopsy. They wanted the vital organs and tissue to be sent to Madrid for further tests. Before this could be done, the Maxwell family intervened, ordering the body embalmed and flown forthwith to Israel for burial. The Spanish authorities, unusually, did not object. Who or what had persuaded the family to suddenly act as it did?

On November 10, 1991 , Maxwell's funeral took place on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, the resting place for the nation's most revered heroes. It had all the trappings of a state occasion, attended by the country's government and opposition leaders. No fewer than six serving and former heads of the Israeli intelligence community listened as Prime Minister Shamir eulogized: "He has done more for Israel than can today be said."

Those who stood among the mourners included a man dressed in a somber black suit and shirt, relieved only at the throat by his Roman collar. Born into a Lebanese Christian family, he was a wraithlike figure-barely five feet tall and weighing little over a hundred pounds. But Father Ibrahim was no ordinary priest. He worked for the Vatican's Secretariat of State. His discreet presence at the funeral was not so much to mark the earthly passing of Robert Maxwell, but to acknowledge the still-secret ties developing between

the Holy See and Israel. It was a perfect example of Meir Amit's dictum that intelligence cooperation knows no limits.